



# The Middle English Period

The History of the English Language

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# The Middle English Period was a time of language change

- 3 time periods
- Changes continuing from the Old English period
- Trilingualism
- A new standard English



# Language Change

- Why does language change?
  - Cultural contact
- What effect does contact have?
  - Simplification
- What contact occurred at the end of the Old English period?
  - Vikings, Norman French



# Language Change

## Early Middle English Period

- Loss of consonant clusters
- Compression of syllables
- Metathesis
- Strong verbs changing to weak verbs
- Reduction of inflections
- Loss of grammatical gender
- Standardized word order



# Loss of consonant clusters

- hlahian, hring, hnehian
- (laugh), (ring), (neigh)
- fnastian, fnortnian
- (sneeze), (snort)
- hwaet
- (what)



# Compression of syllables

- hlaf weard
- (loaf) (warden)
- guardian or warden of the loaf
- Say it real fast
- lord

# How do you pronounce these words?

- Worcestershire sauce
- Gloucester
- Waistcoat





# Metathesis

## Inversion of sound order

- ask → aks
- children, black English
- Brid
  - → bird
- Axian
  - → ask
- Thurgh
  - → through
- Beorht
  - → bright
-





## Strong verbs changing to weak verbs

- Help – helpan, healp, holpen
- Wax – weaxan, weox, weaxen
- What are the conjugations of these verbs?
- Hang
- Hung or Hanged
- Weave
- Wove or Weaved

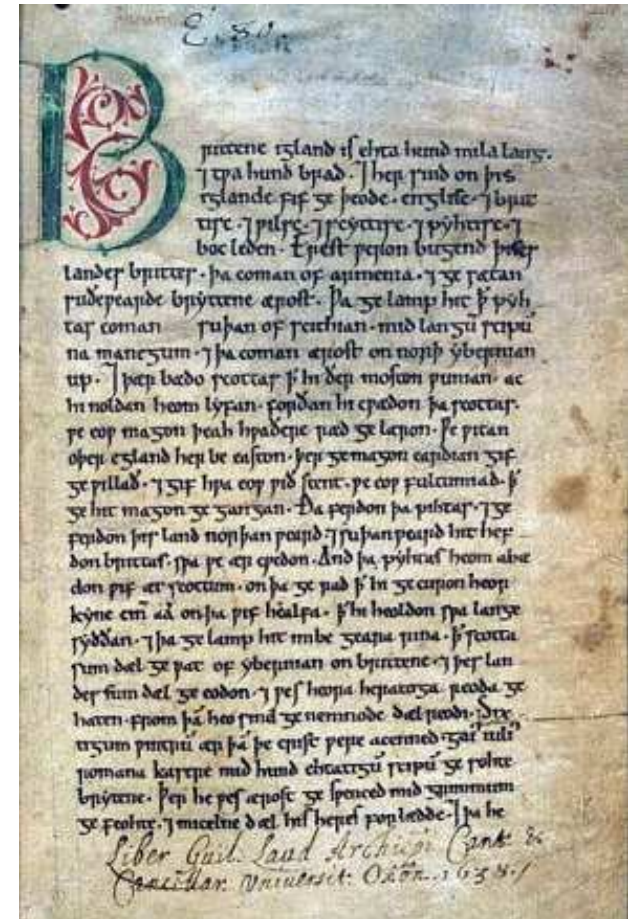


# Reduction of inflections

- Why is there reduction of inflections?

# Reduction of inflections

- Peterborough Chronicle





# Peterborough Chronicle

## Describe what is happening

- “on þisum geare” (1083)
  - dative, classic form
- “on þisom geare” (1117)
  - dative but not using classic form
- “on þis geare” (1135)
  - dative but concord and grammatical gender is lost
- “on þis gear” (1154)
  - inflective endings lost



# Loss of grammatical gender

- wif → hit (neuter)
- wif → heo (feminine)



## Language around 1200

### The Owl and the Nightingale

- Ich was in one sumere dale,  
in one supe dizele hale,  
iherde ich holde grete tale  
an hule and one niztingale.
- Þat plait was stif & starc & strong,  
sum wile softe & lud among;
- All the words are Old English
- Structure of the poem is French
- “plait” is French, rhetoric term meaning to argue
- Notice alliteration in stif & starc & strong





# Trilingualism

- Three languages are used by educated people
- Latin with the church
- French with the government
- English with the common people
- French affects English vocabulary



# Reasons for borrowing

- Why are words borrowed from one language into another?
- Prestige
- Vacant slot (pizza)
- French words quickly borrowed in prestige areas of government, church, high culture, cuisine, education





# Consequences of borrowing

- Germanic languages are resistant to borrowing non-Germanic words
- Form new words by rearranging Germanic word roots
- pg 125:
- burhsittende man = citizen
- mildheortness = mercy
- television = fernsehen
- telephone = fernsprecher
  - (telefon more common now?)



# Consequences of borrowing

- Norman conquest led to a culture change that made borrowing acceptable in English
- Now English is one of languages most open to borrowing



# Borrowing

- Germanic words kept stress on the main word root.
- Romance languages have variable stress
- Record (n) & Record (v)
  - Same word can have different meanings due to stress change
- Canon (n) & Canonize (v)



# Borrowing

- Norman French words differed from Central French words
  - Castle – Chateau
  - Cattle – Chattels
  - Cap – Chapeau
  - Warden – Guardian
  - Ward – Guard
  - Wily, wiles – Guile
  - War – Nom de guerre
  - William – Guillaume



# Borrowing

- French cuisine resulted in the differences between the names of animals and the names for food
- cow—boeuf (beef)
- calf—veau (veal)
- deer (deer)—venison
- sheep—mouton (mutton)
- swine—porc
- fowl—pouletrie (poultry)

# William the Conqueror

**“Castelas he let wyrcean,  
7 earme men swiðe swencean.  
Se cyng wæs swa swiðe stearc,  
7 bena, of his underþeoddan  
manig marc  
goldes 7 ma hundred punda seolfres.”**

**"He had castles built  
and men terribly oppressed,  
The king was very severe,  
and he took from his underlings  
many marks of gold and hundreds  
of pounds of silver."**

# William the Conqueror

- Writer is trying to write a poem in the French style, see the rhyming

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# Trilingualism

- The Harley Lyrics (Manuscript 2253) (ca. 1330)
- I9 Dum Ludis Floribus (lines 17-20)
- Scripsi hec carmina in tabulis;
  - I have written these verses on my tablets;
- Mon ostel es en mi la vile de Paris;
  - My dwelling is in the middle of the city of Paris;
- May y sugge namore, so wel me is;
  - Let me say no more, so things are fine;
- 3ef hi de3e for loue of hire; duel hit ys
  - But if I die for love of her; it would be a pity.





# Trilingualism

- Dum Ludis Floribus (While Playing Floribus)
- Written by a student studying in Paris
- Latin for study and education
- French for living in the city
- English for matters of the heart



# A new standard English

- Standardized word order
- Cumulative negation
- Two kinds of 2<sup>nd</sup> Person
- Vowel system still parallel to present European pronunciation
- No silent letters
- Many OE consonant clusters gone



# Standardized word order

- The result of the loss of inflections was a standardized word order
- A man hadde twei sones. SVO
- Questions: VSO
- Emphasis: VOS, SOV



# Multiple Negatives

- Negatives are cumulative
- “He nevere yet ne vileyne ne sayde unto no manner wight.”
- He never yet in no way said anything bad no how to nobody.
  - Of the Knight in the General Prologue to the Canterbury tales



# The Canterbury Tales

- Written by Geoffrey Chaucer from about 1387-1400.
- Thomas a Beckett is the martyr in Canterbury
- More French integrated in the text than in the Owl and the Nightingale.
- Find the juxtaposition of French and English words.



# General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

- Whan that aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,  
And smale foweles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
(so priketh hem nature in hir corages);  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And specially from every shires ende  
Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.



# General Prologue Translation

- When it happens that April, with his sweet showers, has pierced the drought of March to the root, and bathed every vein in the fluid from whose power the flower is given birth; when Zephyr also, with his sweet breath, has inspired the tender crops in every wood and heather, and the young sun has run half his course through the sign of the Ram, and little birds make melody who sleep all night with their eyes open (so Nature stimulates them in their hearts), then people desire to go on pilgrimages, and professional pilgrims desire to seek strange shores; and they wend their way, especially, from the end of every county in England to Canterbury, in order to seek the holy, blissful martyr who had helped them when they were sick.

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